



Department of Commerce Safety Report

July 2002

Safety Report

July 2002

Introduction

This report provides an update to Department of Commerce (DOC) managers and employees on the progress of Departmental safety initiatives and information regarding important Department-wide safety issues for July 2002. The report also contains the latest available accident data for the Department. Section One of the report, Program Initiatives, provides updates on the safety initiatives outlined in the Safety Program Plan available at <http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram/safety.htm>. Section Two, Significant Safety Issues, outlines safety issues and concerns which arose in July 2002. Section Three, Injury Statistics, provides statistics regarding Department injuries, as reported to the Office of Workers' Compensation for June 2002, and an analysis of the data to assist bureaus in focusing their safety efforts. Section Four, Survey Results, provides the July results from the on-line survey available through the intranet Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Program Web Site.

Section One: Program Initiatives

Workers' Compensation:

The Workers' Compensation Program continues to focus on cost reduction in claims processing. We received a billing report for the current Chargeback Year (CBY) of July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002. The report provides information on the Department of Labor (DOL) disbursement of funds for medical expenses and disability benefits to injured Commerce employees. The report shows a dramatic decrease in costs for CBY 2002. Commerce costs for this period fell from \$21,572,518 to \$15,640,257, a 27.5 percent decrease. The bulk of the decrease is due to the resolution of many 2000 Decennial Census claims. However, the cost associated with non-decennial Census claims also decreased at the rate of 11.3 percent. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) realized a reduction in cost at the rate of 3.3 percent. The reduction brings the NOAA Chargeback cost to a 10-year low. The Chargeback cost for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is at the lowest level since 1987.

To further reduce costs, the Workers' Compensation Program was evaluated for possible outsourcing of claims processing. Preliminary review of the function and the available vendors, showed that there were several vendors on the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule that would be capable of providing quality service to our employees, while reducing costs to our bureau clients. On June 21, 2002, a request for proposals was issued, and a decision on outsourcing this function is currently pending. It is hoped that this procurement will provide additional savings to our bureau clients.

Safety Council: The Safety Council held its monthly meeting on July 11, 2002.

Deborah Jefferson, Acting Director, Office of Human Resources Management, started the meeting off with introductions and supportive words for the Occupational Safety and Health Program. Tony Pierpoint, Safety Director, briefed the Council on a recent evaluation of safety issues at the Herbert C. Hoover Building. Mr. Pierpoint also reported that a draft of the Council Charter is complete and will be distributed to the Council for review and comment. The Council also received updates by the various safety working groups. The meeting included an excellent presentation by Dennis Myers, NIST, on their efforts to eliminate accidents and injuries. Those efforts include enhancement of accident and injury investigation to determine the major causes of accidents, and specialized safety training for employees.

Safety Program Action Plan: We continue to make progress on the Safety Program Action Plan approved by the Deputy Secretary in February. The plan is posted on the new OSH Program Web Site. The four workgroups, which were established to address key components of the proposed Action Plan, continue to work aggressively to identify and implement key initiatives. The goals and activities of each workgroup are listed below. Each group reported its progress at the July Safety Council meeting.

Inspections and Self-Assessment Workgroup - This workgroup is developing a Department-wide methodology for supervisors to conduct safety self-assessments and safety professionals to complete annual workplace inspections. The workgroup is in the final review process of two checklists for supervisor and safety manager inspections. The Checklists will be available on the OSH Web Site very soon.

Communications and Training Policy Workgroup - This workgroup is developing safety awareness and training tools for employees and supervisors. The workgroup is completing final revisions of the DOC Safety Poster and expects to have it ready for distribution in August 2002. The workgroup is also completing final changes to a web-based ergonomics tutorial and is developing an executive level safety training package.

Reporting Workgroup - This workgroup is addressing the challenging task of developing a web-based system to report accidents which will be more comprehensive than the Workers' Compensation system. The workgroup evaluated a number of commercial systems. In June, they reported that the DOL developed their own electronic claims submission and tracking system, but were unable to provide a copy of the application due to legislative inquiry. That issue was resolved and a copy of the application is forthcoming. The workgroup expects to test the system this summer.

Health Units Workgroup - This workgroup is assessing the effectiveness of Department Health Units and developing Departmental policy regarding on-site health and occupational safety services. A formal list of recommendations and guidance is being developed, and should be completed in September.

Section Three: Injury Statistics and Analysis

In previous Safety Reports, we provided information on the total number of Departmental injuries for the past five years, and analyzed the types of injuries across the Department to determine the prevalence of such injuries.

The information below is updated using June 2002 statistics. Due to late submissions, processing limitations, and to ensure the accuracy of the information, this section will continue to include information up to the previous month. The data presented in the charts and tables are based upon Departmental Workers' Compensation Program records. At the present time, Workers' Compensation Program records continue to afford the most comprehensive evidence regarding workplace safety.

Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate: To enable comparison with private industry, we are now using the OSHA "Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rate (TRCIR)" formula as our measure of injuries rather than determining the injury rate per 100 employees. The TRCIR formula divides the number of accidents by the actual hours worked in the organization and multiplies that figure by 200,000, an approximation of potential hours worked for 100 employees. In determining the total hours worked for an organization, we multiplied the number of employees by 1800 hours. A full-time employee can technically work 2087 hours per year if he or she takes no leave. However, given that the average age of our workforce is 46.9 years and the average years of service is 12.8, we imputed the average annual leave accrual rate as seven hours¹. Based on a seven hour annual leave accrual rate, we then estimated that each employee annually uses approximately 280 hours of combined annual, sick, and administrative leave. We subtracted that total from 2087 and rounded down to 1800. Using this formula, we updated injury rates from FY98 to the present and now depict them as total recordable case incidence rates (TRCIR)².

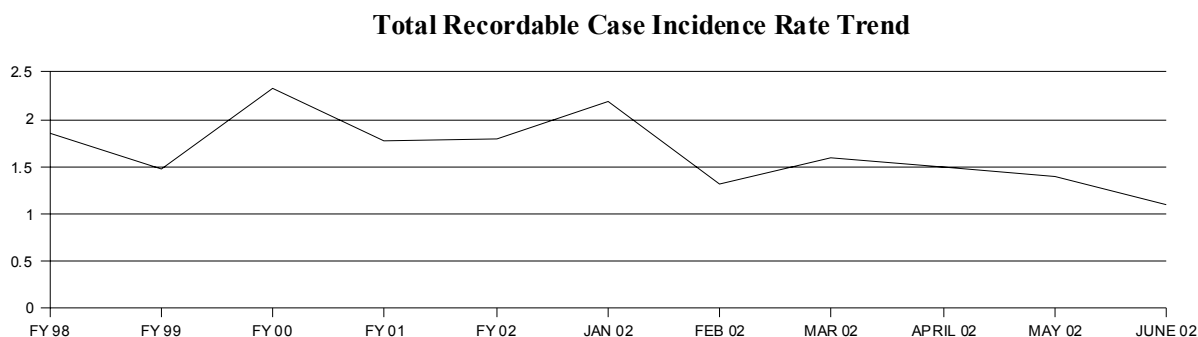
¹An employee with three years of service earns six hours of annual leave per pay period. An employee with 15 years of service earns eight hours per pay period. All full-time employees earn four hours of sick leave per pay period. There are typically 26 pay periods in a leave year.

² **Please note:** The Total Recordable Cases Incidence Rates (TRCIRs) for FY02 presented in this table have been "annualized" based on October 2001 through June 2002 information. To accomplish this "annualization," we took the injuries for the first nine months of FY02, multiplied these numbers by 1.33, and applied the TRCIR formula. This process enabled us to compute a projected annual TRCIR for each bureau, and for the Department. Our assumption, which may or may not be valid, is that TRCIRs will remain somewhat constant over the course of the year. As we prepare new reports, we will incorporate updated statistical data and modify the projected "annualized" rates accordingly.

Major Findings include:

The FY02 TRCIR is comparable to FY01, but down from FY00. Although the data may not yet be complete, the *annualized* FY02 TRCIR is projected at 1.80 based on data from October 2001 through June 2002. The January 2002 TRCIR was 2.18 while the June figure was 1.1. If these figures do not change, the TRCIR will be slightly higher than FY01 (1.78), but lower than FY00 (2.32), as shown in chart one. There were 32 Workers' Compensation claims submitted for injuries or illnesses in June. However, the Workers' Compensation Program continues to receive claims from previous months.

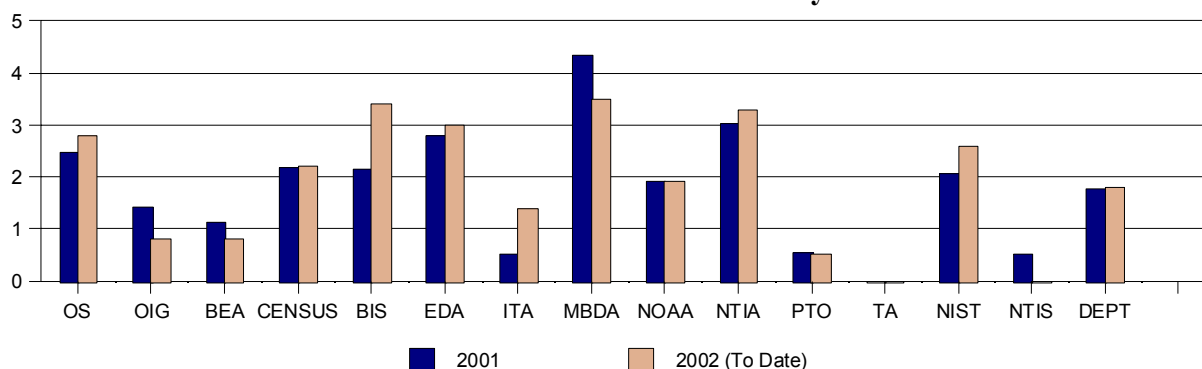
Chart 1



- **Of the larger bureaus, with the exception of NIST and the Office of the Secretary (OS), the FY02 TRCIRs for all bureaus are equivalent to FY01 (see table 1 and chart 2).** The rate for the Department of Commerce as a whole is just slightly up from last year. NIST saw a downward trend for TRCIRs from FY1998 to 2002. However, their projected rate for FY02 is 26 percent higher than last year. OS did not have any injuries reported for May or June 2002. However, claims from exposure to irradiated mail earlier in the year keep the annualized rate high.
- **Of the smaller bureaus (i.e., bureaus with less than 500 employees), the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Economic Development Agency (EDA), and the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) will have higher annual TRCIRs for FY02 than FY01, if injury statistics remain constant.** NTIA and EDA, however, did not report any workers' compensation claims for the month of June. BIS had three claims for the month of June, two of which resulted from injuries during Defensive Tactics Training for Enforcement Officers.

Chart 2

Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate by Bureau



Types of Injuries: Many of the types of injuries reported can be prevented through improved safety awareness and proper maintenance. A Departmental and bureau focus on eliminating injuries and illnesses is essential. Eliminating injuries and illnesses can be accomplished by evaluating the types of claims submitted and structuring safety awareness training programs to eliminate accidents. Information on types of injuries is provided in charts 3 and 4, and tables 2 and 2A. We did not project findings for the remainder of FY02. Key findings are explained below:

- **“Slips/Falls” continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.** “Slips/falls” accounted for 35 percent of all injuries within the Department from FY00 through December 2001. From October 2001 through June 2002, that percentage remained essentially constant at 34 percent of total injuries. Injuries due to “slips/falls” were 28 percent of total injuries for June 2002. More attention should be given to walking surfaces to reduce injuries from slips and falls. Floors that are wet from mopping should have highly visible warning signs, so employees know to avoid those areas. Trips from cords strung across floors continue to cause injuries. Telephone lines, electrical cords, and other cords should be routed away from walking areas.
- **“Exertion” injuries remain second in frequency for FY02.** “Exertion” injuries are 21 and 19 percent of total injuries for FY02 and the month of June, respectively. To prevent back injuries, employees should use a cart to move objects, and avoid hand carrying them. Proper lifting technique includes keeping the back straight and lifting with the legs. For jobs that require repetitive motion, an ergonomics assessment should be conducted.

- **“Struck and Contact” injuries are also a concern.** These injuries combined for 21 percent of those reported for FY02, and 25 percent for June 2002. A majority of the injuries for FY02 were caused when employees struck open drawers, doors, or low overhead clearances. Those injuries can be avoided by closing drawers that are not being used. Employees should also be aware of their surroundings and use caution. Low overhead clearances should be marked with highly visible paint or tape.
- **Exposures” are on the decline from early FY02.** A number of illnesses from exposure due to irradiated mail occurred early in the year. However, only one illness associated with exposure was reported for month of June. The case involved a Census employee who was potentially exposed to tuberculosis. The percentage of total injuries for exposure is 6 percent for FY02 and 3 percent for June 2002. Most exposure illnesses can be prevented through proper ventilation and use of personal protective equipment.

Chart 3
Injury Type As Percentage of Total Injuries for
FY02 Through June 2002

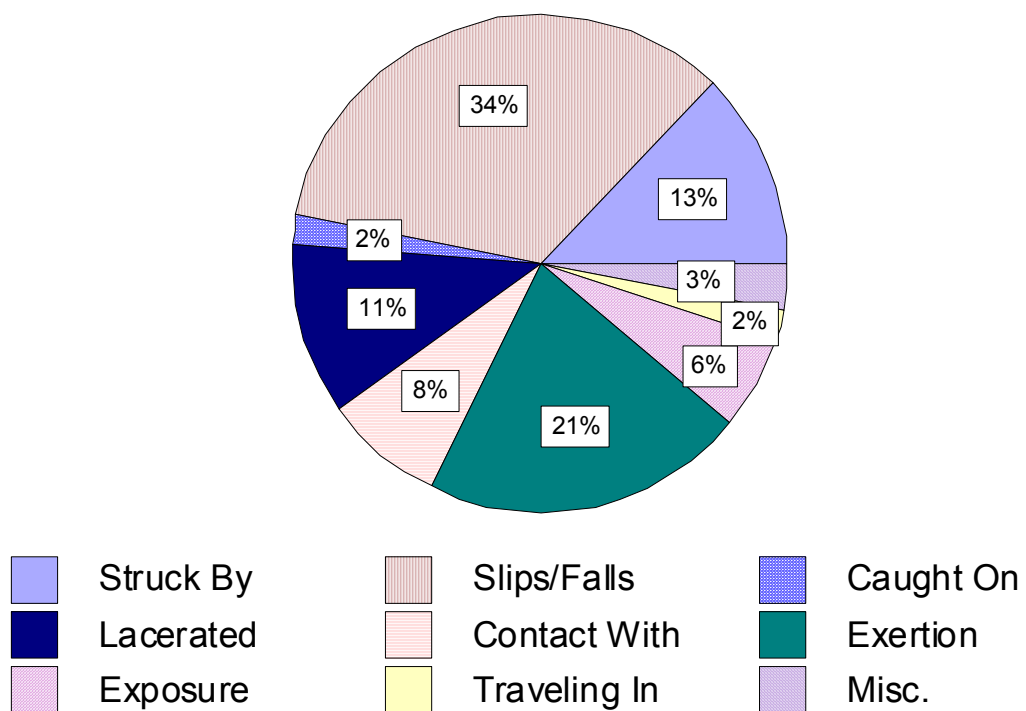
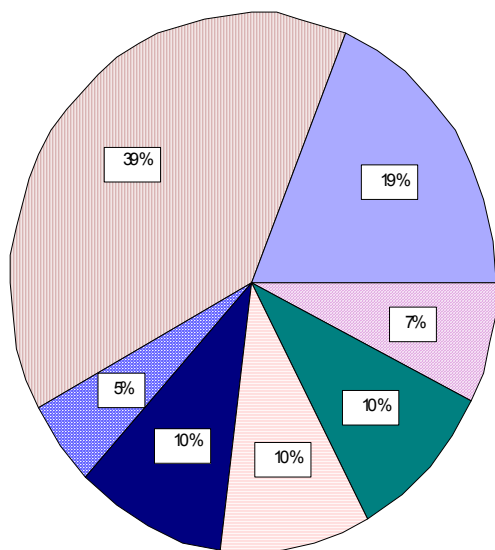


Chart 4

Injury Type As Percentage Of Total Injuries

MAY 2002



JUNE 2002

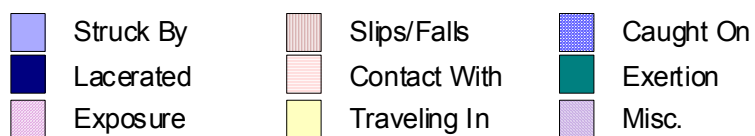
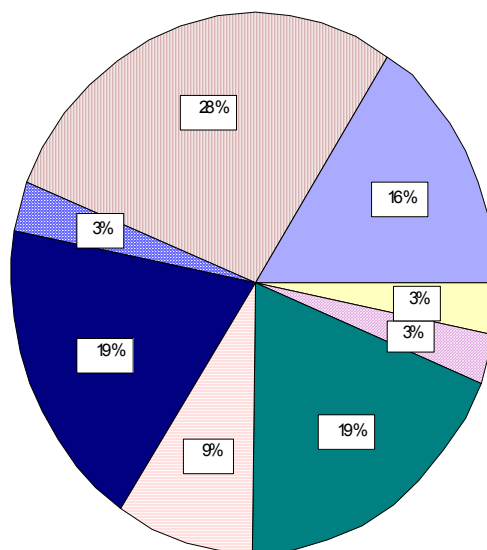


TABLE 1
TOTAL RECORDABLE CASE INCIDENCE RATE

Bureau	FY1998		FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		April 2002		May 2002		June 2002		FY 2002 (To Date)		
															Actual	Annualized	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	No.	Rate
Office of the Secretary	17	2.6	19	2.2*	34	3.82	22	2.46	1	1.5	0	0	0	0	17	23	2.8
Office of Inspector General	2	1.22	2	1.32	5	3.72	2	1.42	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.8
Bureau of Economic Analysis	8	1.74	4	0.88	1	0.22	5	1.12	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0.8
Bureau of the Census	282	1.32	311	1.02	383	2.82	357	2.18	27	2.9	20	2.2	11	1.2	179	238	2.2
Bureau of Industry and Security	10	3.0	11	3.06	15	4.06	8	2.16	0	0	0	0	3	10.3	9	12	3.4
Economic Development Administration	4	1.7	9	3.66	4	1.68	5	2.8	0	0	2	10.2	0	0	5	7	3.0
International Trade Administration	26	1.32	18	0.9	24	1.22	10	0.5	1	0.8	0	0	1	0.7	18	24	1.4
Minority Business Development Agency	1	1.12	1	1.1	3	3.4	4	4.34	0	0	2	27.8	0	0	2	3	3.5
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	280	2.52	317	2.78	306	2.66	216	1.9	19	2.1	17	1.8	10	1.1	161	214	1.9
National Telecommunications & Information Administration	3	1.2	2	.88	2	0.86	7	3.02	1	5.2	0	0	0	0	6	8	3.3
Patent and Trademark Office	38	0.72	27	0.46	29	0.5	31	0.54	1	0.2	2	0.4	2	0.4	23	31	0.5
Technology Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Institute of Standards and Technology	105	3.56	84	2.86	80	2.86	60	2.06	7	2.9	7	2.9	5	2.0	58	77	2.6
National Technical Information Service	2	0.64	6	2.6	4	2.14	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	778	1.86	811	1.48	890	2.32	728	1.78	57	2	50	1.7	32	1.1	481	641	1.8
Decennial Census 2000	182	3.42	890	11.32	4798	6.65	32	13.33	N/A		N/A						

*Population fluctuations can have a serious positive or negative impact on the Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate.

Table 2

**INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH MORE THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through June 2002)**

BUREAU	NOAA			CENSUS			NIST			PTO			ITA			OS			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	
Struck By/Against An Object	42	24	20	54	56	16	17	16	1	4	6	4	1	1	1	0	5	0	268
Falls/Slips	83	72	49	96	153	81	17	19	22	11	13	7	13	5	7	9	10	0	667
Caught On An Object	6	4	3	8	9	7	1	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	45
Cuts/Bites	29	20	19	55	36	16	15	12	8	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	220
Contact With An Object	23	13	12	49	24	11	8	1	5	5	6	6	1	1	2	0	1	1	169
Exertion/ Motion	75	64	43	99	54	30	15	7	12	8	3	1	4	1	2	6	3	1	428
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	29	13	7	12	7	4	4	3	2	0	0	1	0	1	6	18	0	12	119
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	4	4	8	3	10	11	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	44
Miscellaneous*	15	2	0	7	8	3	2	1	5	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	48
TOTAL**	306	216	161	383	357	179	80	60	58	29	31	23	24	10	18	34	22	17	2008

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stroke.

** Decennial Census claims were omitted to provide a clearer picture of injury trends

Table 2A

**INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU
AGENCIES WITH LESS THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through June 2002)**

Bureau	OIG			ESA/BEA			EDA			TA			NTIS			NTIA			MBDA			BIS			
Fiscal Year	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	
Struck By/Against An Object	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	5	0	2	14
Falls/Slips	4	2	0	1	2	1	2	4	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	3	3	3	2	6	6	0	51
Caught On An Object	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Cuts/Bites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact With An Object	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	8
Exertion/Motion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	2	9
Exposure To Chemicals/Elements	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Traveling In Car/Metro/Taxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Miscellaneous*	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	5	2	3	1	5	2	4	5	5	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	7	6	3	4	2	15	8	9	93

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stroke.

